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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine the preparation of principals to deal with incompetent or marginal teachers. There is some concern that principals may not be current on effective teaching techniques, may not have sufficient time during the day to deal with management demands as well as teacher observation and assistance, and may not have sufficient resources available from the school district for training/retraining. It is also a concern that administrative certification programs may not provide adequate training in appropriate methods of evaluation and conferencing; consequently, stress may be created when an administrator deals with an unsatisfactory teacher. A survey created for this study using "The Administrative Attitudes Toward Unsatisfactory Teachers" instrument, was administered to 722 elementary and secondary public school principals in Pennsylvania. According to survey results, principals perceive that they use sound instructional leadership practices; report that they are fairly effective in dealing with unsatisfactory teachers; do not experience a great deal of psychological stress in dealing with unsatisfactory teachers; and find time management, supportive resources, and administrative certification programs are major problems. Four tables are appended. (Author/LL)

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The Marginal Teacher: A Survey of Principals' Attitudes

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Abstract

The Marginal Teacher: A Survey of Principals' Attitudes

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Principals do not seem to deal effectively with incompetent or marginal teachers. Based upon research by Bridges (1986, 1985), Guthrie and Willower (1973), Katz (1988) and others, there is growing concern that principals may be inadequately prepared to deal with unsatisfactory teachers. Principals' perceptions of areas such as knowledge of effective teaching techniques, time allocation, adequacy of district resources, principal certification programs, and their feelings and emotions that make dealing with an unsatisfactory teachers a stressful situation were examined.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has 2,628 elementary and secondary school principals in its public schools. With the assistance of the State Department of Education, a stratified, random sample of 978 principals was selected. A total of 722 surveys were returned yielding a 74% return rate.

The Administrative Attitudes Toward Unsatisfactory Teachers survey was developed for use in this study. This instrument contains 41 items that represent five scales--Instructional Leadership, Time Allocation, Supportive Resources, Training/Retraining, and Psychological Factors. Respondents were asked to rate each of the 41 items on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree).

Analyses of the data included descriptive statistics and one-way analyses of variance.

Principals in Pennsylvania perceive that they use sound instructional leadership practices and believe they are fairly effective in dealing with unsatisfactory teachers. Principals also report that they do not experience a great deal of psychological stress in dealing with unsatisfactory teachers.

Time management, supportive resources, and principal certification programs were identified as major problems they face. There were statistically significant differences among groups (level of assignment, education level, etc.) with respect to the mean score on each of the five scales.

The Marginal Teacher: A Survey of Principals' Attitudes

Statement of Problem

Principals do not seem to deal effectively with incompetent or marginal teachers. Based upon research by Bridges (1986, 1985), Guthrie and Willower (1973), Katz (1988) and others, there is growing concern that principals may be inadequately prepared to deal with unsatisfactory teachers. Principals may not be current on effective teaching techniques, have sufficient time during their day to deal with all the management demands on their time in addition to teacher observation and assistance, or have sufficient resources available from their districts. In addition, principal certification programs may not be providing adequate training to principal candidates in appropriate methods of teacher evaluation and conferencing. Finally, principals may have disruptive feelings and emotions that make dealing with an unsatisfactory teachers a stressful situation.

Each of these areas will be assessed to determine the extent to which principals are having difficulty dealing with unsatisfactory teachers. In addition, this paper will examine the relationship between principals' reported attitudes toward unsatisfactory teachers and certain demographic variables (e.g., level of assignment, years of experience, education level, etc.). Finally, based upon the findings of this research, recommendations will be made to help principals deal with marginal teachers and to improve the level of teacher effectiveness in their schools.

Conceptual Framework

Each of the five areas discussed below emerge from the literature as being major factors that contribute to principals' difficulties in dealing with unsatisfactory teachers. Each of these areas of are briefly discussed below.

Instructional Leadership. McNally in a speech given in 1974 at the National Elementary Principal's Chauta stated that principals have difficulty performing as effective instructional leaders. He said, "Principals do not exercise instructional leadership to any considerable degree, though it is widely agreed that this is their most important responsibility" (Palaniuk, 1987). This newly emerging role in administration has caused considerable confusion and anxiety among principals. A 1983 survey conducted with principals in the state of Georgia found most educational administrators ranked a lack of preparation for the role of instructional leader as one of their major concerns (Katz, 1988).

Time Allocation. The dilemma of dealing with unsatisfactory teacher performance not only requires effective instructional leadership, but dictates that the person in charge of supervision has the sufficient time to work with teachers. The highest stressor in educational administrative positions is the need to get things done on time (Wiggins, 1983). Principals find themselves constantly running from one task to the next with little time for reflection or thought. A typical day consists of many activities of short duration, several interruptions, plans being superseded by others, a variety of tasks, many perceived unimportant decisions, and a major portion of time spent on student discipline and teacher non-instructional needs. All of these factors create a day filled with an unpredictable and hectic flow of work (Pitner and Russell, 1985-86). After all of this, how much time is left for a principal to schedule classroom observations and private conferences with teachers?

Supportive Resources. Even if principals did have the knowledge and time to work on instructional effectiveness with their staff, success would be hard to achieve without the district offering appropriate financial and personnel resources. Over the years, school boards have capitulated to strong collective bargaining units which have reduced the principal's potency in dealing with teacher performance.

Though support from district policy and bargaining concessions play an important part in determining the principal's effectiveness in dealing with teacher competency, it is actually the financial commitment of offering additional services that determines how poorly performing teachers will be handled. Most districts place the burden of remediation on the principal to save costs incurred from specialists in this area.

Training/Retraining. Principals on the job have reported a desire for additional job knowledge and skills. Many feel unprepared for their jobs (Snyder and Johnson, 1985). In 1986, the Governors' Task Force on Leadership and Management studied the quality of principal training programs. Recommendations from the study included revision of selection and certification of principals in each state, matching the content of Educational Administration programs with the training that is needed to be an effective principal, developing a system to evaluate principals effectively and accurately, providing inservice training to school administrators, and rewarding principals and schools for their effectiveness (Clinton, 1986).

Psychological. The psychological consequences of threatening another human being's self-worth becomes a critical issue for principals when they are face-to-face with teachers who are not performing satisfactorily. As one principal put it, "When problems with a

certain teacher come up, the principal works not so much in solving the problem but reducing the tension in their job. They feel that it is a no-win situation when a teacher is involved" (Ionnone, 1987).

Bridges clearly defines four psychological feelings that can cause a principal great discomfort when faced with the situation of teacher incompetence: fear, anger, self-doubt, and guilt.

Methodology

Sample selection. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has 2,628 elementary and secondary school principals in its public schools. With the assistance of the State Department of Education, a stratified, random sample of 978 principals was selected. A total of 722 surveys were returned yielding a 74% return rate.

Instrumentation. The Administrative Attitudes Toward Unsatisfactory Teachers survey was developed for use in this study. This instrument contains 41 items that represent five scales--Instructional Leadership, Time Allocation, Supportive Resources, Training/Retraining, and Psychological Factors. Respondents were asked to rate each of the 41 items on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree).

The instrument was pilot tested on approximately 150 principals. It was found that the internal consistency reliabilities for all scales were in the acceptable range for an affective measure (alpha > .70).

Statistical Analyses. Descriptive statistics will address the first objective of this study (i.e., frequencies, standard deviations, and means) to determine principals' current

attitudes on each of the five scales. The second objective will be analyzed using four one-way analysis of variance procedures. The independent variables will be education background, years in education, years in current poshtion, and level of assignment. The dependent variables will be the means for each of the five scales on the instrument.

Results

Principals in Pennsylvania perceive that they use sound instructional leadership practices and believe that they are fairly effective in dealing with unsatisfactory teachers. Principals also report that they do not experience a great deal of psychological stress in dealing with unsatisfactory teachers.

Pennsylvania's principals report that time management is a major problem they face. In addition, many principals report that the supportive resources from their districts are not at a level that they are comfortable with. Principals also reported that their administrative certification programs leave a lot to be desired in the areas of instructional supervision of unsatisfactory teachers.

Over 50% of the principals surveyed indicated that, if they could, they would replace 3-10% of their staff. Yet 94% of the principals reported giving less than 2% of the teachers unsatisfactory ratings. Clearly, their is a large percentage of teachers that are not performing at acceptable levels yet principals seem to believe they cannot effectively deal with the problem.

There were statistically significant differences among groups (level of assignment, education level, etc.) with respect to the mean score on each of the five scales.

Significance

A major weakness in the area of the administrative approaches toward unsatisfactory teachers is the lack of quantitative studies that deal specifically on the issue. Katz, Snyder and Johnson attempted by surveys to report on how administrators felt on administrative skills and problems while Bridges chose to interview principals over the phone. Areas that were examined were broad in scope. The bulk of the literature in teacher evaluation and remediation mainly deals with the personal perceptions of educators and administrators working in the field.

Principals rank supervision and evaluation of teachers as one of the most important functions of their job and sincerely want to be successful in this role. But the limitations of time, support, and training that are needed in order to be effective seriously hamper their competency--especially when a poorly performing teacher is on staff. With all the additional job expectations that are piled on to an existing full load, principals are forced into a situation of wearing too many hats at one time. The resultant effect is that administrators are not sure which hat to wear at what time and grow extremely over-extended in their jobs. Their role as mentor and evaluator to the teaching staff becomes curtailed.

This paper will closely examine the constraints discussed in this proposal, to uncover aspects that are sensitive, and to find ways to help improve both the principals' effectiveness and the quality of teaching.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations by Scale

Scale	Mean	Standard Deviation
Instructional Leadership	4.3	.47
Time Allocation	2.8	.69
Supportive Resources	3.5	.75
Psychological Factors	2.1	.60
Certification	2.6	.94
Effectiveness	4.0	.59

Table 2

Comparisons of Education Level
for Each Scale

Scale	M.A. M.Ed. (n=19)	M.A./M.Ed. +15 (n=140)	M.A./M.Ed. +30 (n=452)	Ed.D. Ph.D. (n=104)	Comparison
Instructional Leadership	4.13 .53	4.23 .45	4.33 .47	4.43 ** .45	2 < 4
Time Allocation	2.56 .50	2.70 .64	2.76 .71	2.95 * .67	2 < 4
Supportive Resources	3.14 .72	3.43 .69	3.50 .75	3.52 .81	
Certification Program	2.64 .86	2.52 .82	2.57 .96	2.63 .97	
Psychological Factors	2.01 .65	2.24 .60	2.03 .60	1.94 .52	
Perceived Effectiveness	3.98 .56	3.88 .59	3.96 .58	4.13 ** .57	2 < 4

* $p \leq .05$
** $p \leq .01$

Table 3

Comparisons of Level of Assignment
for Each Scale

Scale	Elem. (n=379)	Middle (n=84)	Jr. High (n=40)	Sr. High (n=127)	Other (n=87)	Comparison
Instructional Leadership	4.37 .45	4.30 .51	4.31 .50	4.20 .43	4.27 * .52	1 > 4
Time Allocation	2.83 .67	2.75 .72	2.85 .84	2.66 .69	2.64 * .66	
Supportive Resources	3.46 .74	3.56 .74	3.57 .83	3.54 .78	3.34 .75	
Certification Program	2.56 .93	2.62 .96	2.50 .90	2.58 .93	2.57 1.0	
Psychological Factors	2.04 .60	2.09 .63	1.98 .52	2.09 .56	2.08 .65	
Perceived Effectiveness	3.99 .56	4.02 .61	3.98 .46	3.88 .61	3.92 .69	

* $p \leq .05$

Table 4

Comparisons of Current Position
for Each Scale

Scale	Years 1 - 2 (n=165)	3 - 5 (n=172)	6 - 11 (n=161)	12+ (n=171)	Comparison
Instructional Leadership	4.29 .47	4.35 .48	4.32 .50	4.33 .44	
Time Allocation	2.82 .74	2.78 .69	2.67 .69	2.80 .65	
Supportive Resources	3.46 .68	3.53 .80	3.46 .78	3.48 .73	
Certification Program	2.91 .96	2.59 .90	2.35 .84	2.43 * .92	1>2,3,4
Psychological Factors	2.12 .56	2.08 .63	2.06 .64	1.94 .55	
Perceived Effectiveness	3.98 .50	3.98 .57	3.88 .70	4.04 .57	

* $p \leq .05$